

POLICY DIALOGUE IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION: WHAT ROLE FOR CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS?

**A pilot survey in the Southern and
Eastern Mediterranean**

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- the European Economic and Social Committee²;
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¹ The Anna Lindh Foundation is an international organisation working throughout the Mediterranean region to promote intercultural and civil society dialogue in the face of growing mistrust and polarisation. Founded in 2004, the foundation is currently working out of its Alexandria headquarters. www.annalindhfoundation.org/

² The European Economic and Social Committee is a consultative body that gives representatives of Europe's socio-occupational interest groups and others a formal platform to express their opinions on EU issues. Its views are addressed to the Council, the European Commission and the European Parliament. It thus has a key role to play in the Union's decision-making process. www.eesc.europa.eu

³ The EU is represented through some 140 delegations and offices around the world. For over 50 years, these delegations and offices have acted as the eyes, ears and mouthpiece of the European Commission vis-à-vis the authorities and populations of their host countries. https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/about/eu-delegations_en

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The European Union (EU) considers civil society organisations (CSOs) as key partners in its external actions. In 2012, the EU laid out its approach to CSOs in the document *The roots of democracy and sustainable development: Europe's engagement with civil society in external relations*, and five years later it reaffirmed that this support for CSOs should be mainstreamed in all external instruments.

In carrying out its activities, the ETF has been working with branches of the civil society for many years, including non-governmental organisations (NGOs), community-based organisations and other non-state actors. In 2015, the ETF organised a round table in Turin, with 30 CSOs from over 20 different countries, to gain a more in-depth understanding of the role CSO actors play in the wider multilevel and multi-actor VET governance ecosystem.

Whereas the role of the government and social partners⁴, as well as that of the private sector and VET training providers, in such a multilevel governance set-up has been relatively well defined, the nature of CSOs' contribution is less clear-cut. To better understand the added value of the CSOs' role in the multilevel governance of VET, their contribution can be contextualised in the following phases: (a) strategy formulation and policy design; (b) training provision and monitoring; and (c) policy evaluation and review.

Chapter 1 – The ETF conducted a pilot e-survey across seven countries of the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean (SEMED) region, namely: Algeria, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine⁵ and Tunisia. The e-survey was implemented through parallel channels, including CSO contacts from an ETF database and links established by the Anna Lindh Foundation and the delegations of the EU in the individual countries. At the same time, a social media campaign was launched. By the closing date, 85 organisations from across the seven countries had responded to the survey. Although limited in numbers, this was considered a good response, which provided valuable indicative results on the situation of CSOs in the region. In addition, a focus group took place with a dozen CSOs in Tunisia, and the NGO-VET league was interviewed in Palestine, helping to contextualise some of the dynamics around CSOs' involvement in VET policies in the region.

Chapter 2 – Almost half of the responses were from two countries, namely Tunisia and Palestine, with the other half equally distributed among the remaining countries. The majority of NGOs surveyed were active at the sub-national (regional) level, while a third were active at the grassroots (community) level, or operated at the national level. Two out of three organisations received donor funding (a figure that is even higher in the Mashreq region), and just over half of the CSOs worked with government funding (a more prominent feature in the Maghreb).

Chapter 3 – A shortlist of activities emerged as the core business of CSOs in the VET implementation phase, namely: support for employability and providing initial VET (both scoring close to 60%), before provision for those with specific needs and encouraging entrepreneurship (44.7% and 43.5%). The focus on entrepreneurial skills stands out, whereas the low response for continuous training and adult education somewhat throws into doubt the assumption that CSOs play a leading role in non-formal education within the context of lifelong learning.

⁴ In order to avoid confusion and to shed more light on the contribution of one specific part of civil society (namely NGOs, community-based organisations and other non-state actors), social partners are not the prime focus when referring to CSOs here.

⁵ This designation shall not be construed as recognition of a State of Palestine and is without prejudice to the individual position of the Member States on this issue, hereinafter 'Palestine'.

In terms of beneficiaries, 81.2% of the organisations focused on young people, which was not a surprising result given the vast contingent of youth population in the SEMED region. Less evident is the reason for the low response (around 20%) with regard to addressing the training needs of specific groups, such as the unemployed, people with disabilities, and migrants and/or refugees, or providing adult education.

Chapter 4 – Some 44% of the organisations in the SEMED region declared that they were not consulted concerning the development of VET policies. Although a slight majority of the CSOs did have a say in the VET dialogue, most of these consultations happened on an ad-hoc basis, while a smaller number (only 17%) were consulted on a regular basis. The involvement of organisations in decision-making depended on several factors and was far from systematic. The CSOs felt that it was always up to them to make an effort to maintain good relationships with the relevant actors in order to be invited to contribute to the VET dialogue, and whether they gained a seat at the table often depended on the strength of personal relationships. About one-third stated that they had been able to provide input into policy formulation; this figure rose to almost one in two for the respondents working at the national level.

The importance of belonging to a network should not be underestimated. The level of consultation rose to two-thirds for those CSOs who had organised themselves into a network, and dropped below 50% for those who had not. This was further confirmed by the example of the NGO-VET league in Palestine, which – thanks to its network – now has a formal place in the VET policy dialogue. Another variable that seems to have had an influence on accessing the VET policy environment is CSOs' funding source: two-thirds of those working with donor funding had been invited to participate in policy discussions, compared to only 44% of those receiving private donations. This was further confirmed by the focus group in Tunisia, where participants corroborated that being part of a donor-funded project can secure you a seat at the table where policies are formulated.

Chapter 5 – The role CSOs are assumed to play in terms of promoting transparency and accountability within the policy arena was not borne out by the responses of CSOs active in VET in the SEMED region who completed the e-survey. Less than a quarter of them stated that they had contributed to either monitoring or evaluating VET policy implementation. However, it is noteworthy that this response rate doubled for the group of organisations working at the national level compared to those working at grassroots level. One of the reasons given for this limited engagement was the lack of effective communication channels.

Chapter 6 – When asked about how they perceived their added value within the VET policy cycle, the CSOs provided a list of their top priorities, including: addressing special needs (not reached by the system); facilitating social dialogue; and focusing on the quality, innovation and effectiveness of VET training provision. The focus group in Tunisia brought these aims together in four main areas: proximity (being embedded close to the beneficiaries); credibility (being recognised by the beneficiaries), relevance (providing training and services adapted to the needs of the beneficiaries); and quality/innovation (having a flexible training offer that allows for testing and provides the potential for scaling).

In terms of aspirations, ahead of the desire for additional funding, the CSOs wanted to be able to contribute more to the VET planning process, to have greater involvement in training provision, or to play an increased role in effective partnerships, where their contribution in a multi-stakeholder environment is recognised.

Conclusions and recommendations – CSOs have an acknowledged role to play as non-state actors in terms of VET policy shaping, and are equally making a valuable contribution in terms of implementing of high-quality, innovative and relevant VET training and providing employment services

in the SEMED region. However, CSOs' role in terms of reviewing training provision and holding the public VET service providers accountable is clearly underdeveloped in the region.

More than the desire for additional funding, the CSOs surveyed expressed their hope of having a greater input in the VET planning process or playing an increased role in effective partnerships, in which their contribution in a multi-stakeholder environment is recognised. Implementing donor-supported VET programmes and/or becoming a member of, or setting up, a CSO network, appear to be factors that could enhance their participation in the VET policy arena.

Based on the above, two sets of recommendations can be made. The first aims at raising awareness around the demonstrated added value that CSOs already bring to the table and how they could be contributing even more if allowed greater participation in the VET policy environment. The second focuses on developing a wider understanding of CSOs' involvement in the VET policy cycle through further research.

INTRODUCTION

Developments in vocational education and training (VET) intersect with social, economic and labour market policies, impacting young people and adults, as well as the employed and the unemployed. Governments across countries establish dialogue and cooperation with a wide variety of stakeholders to respond to the diverse needs of these groups through formal and non-formal learning.

Whereas, in the course of its activities, the ETF has been working with civil society organisations (CSOs) for many years (including NGOs, community-based organisations and other non-state actors), the specific role of the CSO as a stakeholder in the wider VET governance ecosystem has so far not been examined at great length. Social partners (including workers' unions or employer federations) are considered part of civil society, but, in contrast to other CSO actors, they play a more formal role in the VET policy arena in most countries as part of a structured tripartite dialogue. In order to avoid confusion and to shed more light on the contribution of one specific part of civil society (namely NGOs, community-based organisations and other non-state actors), social partners are not the prime focus when referring to CSOs here.

In 2015, the European Training Foundation (ETF) launched an initiative with the aim of gathering information on the role of CSOs in the areas of VET provision and employability. In October 2015, the ETF organised a round table in Turin, entitled 'VET governance in ETF partner countries: What role for civil society?' In total 30 CSOs from over 20 countries took part in this event, including representatives from European and international organisations. Although the round table led to fruitful discussions, participants concluded that more research was needed to better understand the contribution of CSOs to VET.

In 2018, the ETF launched a more in-depth piece of research with CSOs in a selected group of countries from the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean (SEMED). Based on the collected evidence, this report will share some insights into the role CSOs play in the VET dialogue there. It will also reflect on the challenges encountered by CSOs in their engagement with partner countries, in addition to providing some lessons learnt and recommendations for highlighting CSOs' added value within the VET ecosystem.

The role of civil society in the EU external actions

The European Union (EU) considers CSOs⁶ as key partners in its external actions in terms of shaping strategies with a view to improving local ownership of development processes. In 2012, the EU took its long-standing support for civil society a step further by formulating a more ambitious approach in its document *The roots of democracy and sustainable development: Europe's engagement with civil society in external relations*.

An empowered civil society, in all its diversity, represents a crucial and integral component of any democracy and constitutes an asset in itself. Civil society actors can foster pluralism and contribute to more effective policies, equitable development and inclusive growth. Civil society

⁶ The EU considers CSOs to include all non-state, not-for-profit structures (non-partisan and non-violent), through which people organise to pursue shared objectives and ideals, whether political, cultural, social or economic. They include membership-based, cause-based and service-oriented CSOs. Among them are community-based organisations, NGOs, faith-based organisations, foundations, research institutions, gender and LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) organisations, cooperatives, professional and business associations, and the not-for-profit media.

Trade unions and employers' organisations, the so-called social partners, constitute a specific category within civil society. For the sake of this study, social partners are viewed as traditionally playing a role within a structured tripartite policy environment of training and employment, while CSOs (as defined above) rarely do.

organisations (CSOs) have the capacity to empower, represent, defend and reach out to vulnerable and socially excluded groups, including minorities. They can also foster economic and human development, as well as social cohesion and innovation. Moreover, CSOs often engage in initiatives to advance participatory democracy for transparent, accountable and legitimate governance, also in fragile situations.

Council of the European Union, 2012, p. 2

Five years later, the Council of the European Union further reaffirmed that EU support for civil society should feature more prominently in all partnerships, and a more strategic engagement with CSOs should be mainstreamed in all external instruments and programmes and in all areas of cooperation, in particular in EU Development Policy, the European Neighbourhood Policy and the EU Enlargement Policy. In its conclusions, the Council stressed the importance of ensuring the meaningful and structured participation of CSOs in dialogues on policies, budgets and aid priorities at country level. As such, it framed the EU's engagement with civil society in external relations as a key element for the successful implementation of the EU Global Strategy and the 2030 Agenda, including the realisation of the Sustainable Development Goals. To ensure progress in this area, the Council called on the Commission to pursue and strengthen its engagement with civil society and to report back to the Council by May 2019 at the latest (Council of the European Union, 2017)⁷.

The role of civil society in VET multilevel governance

Most of the VET reforms that have taken place in the ETF partner countries in recent years have sought a more equitable sharing of responsibilities among different actors, with a shift towards more participatory, multilevel governance approaches. Countries are increasingly recognising that the tradition of highly centralised governance has to at least develop some flexibility, and perhaps even transform itself, in order to respond to the modern demands made of VET (ETF, 2013).

The principle of subsidiarity is key in implementing the deconcentration, delegation and/or devolution of responsibilities to other VET policy actors. The horizontal and vertical dimensions of good multilevel governance of the VET sector address complex relationships between governmental and non-governmental actors, and form new social partnerships. This subsidiarity principle could enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of VET reforms that address institutional arrangements, communication and financing. Eventually, all of these elements can contribute to the enhancing the performance of VET systems (ETF, 2019).

The ETF acknowledges that good multilevel governance in VET should be understood as a model for the management of VET policy-making, based on coordinated action to involve public and private stakeholders in VET at all possible levels (international, national, sectoral, regional/local, provider) in objective setting, implementation, monitoring and review. Good multilevel governance in VET aims to reinforce the interaction and participation of such stakeholders while improving the relevance, accountability, transparency, coherence, efficiency and effectiveness of VET policies (ETF, 2015a).

Whereas the role of the government and social partners, as well as that of the private sector and VET training providers, in such a multilevel governance set-up has been defined relatively clearly, the nature of the CSO contribution is less straightforward.

⁷ Civil Society Forum – Southern Neighbourhood (Brussels, 28–29 May 2015).

To better understand the value added by CSOs in this multilevel structure, their contribution can be contextualised in the following phases:

- strategy formulation and policy design;
- implementation of training provision and monitoring;
- policy evaluation and review.

Structure of the report

Based on the information collected from CSOs in a number of SEMED countries, the following chapters will investigate the role of such organisations in the VET policy cycle. Chapter 1 introduces the methodology applied to this exploratory research, which included an e-survey and a focus group. Chapter 2 provides an overview of the main characteristics of the research participants. With an initial focus on VET training and the delivery of services, Chapter 3 describes the contribution of CSOs to training provision and monitoring. The following chapter, by contrast, looks at the role of CSOs in policy making via their engagement in ministry-led fora. Chapter 5 seeks to understand if CSOs exercise a 'watchdog' function, taking on the task of evaluating and reviewing VET, while Chapter 6 aims to identify the overall added value of CSOs in the VET ecosystem. Finally, conclusions are drawn and recommendations made in the last chapter.

1. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The aim of this chapter is to provide an overview of the methodology used in the implementation of the research project, which included an e-survey and focus group discussions.

- Between September and October 2018, the ETF conducted an e-survey with the purpose of collecting country-specific information on the participation of CSOs in the VET policy cycle in the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean (SEMED) partner countries.
- In November 2018, the ETF organised a focus group discussion with a dozen CSOs in Tunisia and conducted an interview at the NGO-VET league network in Palestine to better define the characteristics of CSOs' participation in the VET dialogue process and to identify 'champions' in this field.

1.1 E-survey

Methodology

Conducted as a pilot research project across seven SEMED countries – Algeria, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine and Tunisia⁸ – the e-survey was posted online for one month (from the end of September to the end of October 2018). In order to facilitate engagement, it was available in three languages: English, French and Arabic.

The target group for the e-survey was organisations active in the following fields:

1. vocational education and training (both school- and work-based learning);
2. lifelong learning (the training and re-training of employees, or the not-employed population, migrants, etc.);
3. employment and employability (activities supporting youth/migrants/vulnerable groups or related to career guidance or non-formal learning).

The questionnaire was structured in four sections.

- Section A: organisation profile (for organisations active in the VET/employability fields). This section contained questions about the main characteristics of the organisation (size, sector, field of activity, etc.).
- Section B: participation in the VET dialogue and VET policy cycle (for organisations active in the VET/employability fields). This section contained questions referring to the participation of the organisation in the VET dialogue process, the main institutional counterparts, and the organisation's contribution to the VET policy cycle.
- Section C: current input to the VET policy cycle (for organisations contributing to the VET policy cycle). This section contained questions about the content of the organisation's contribution to the VET policy cycle.
- Section D: potential input to the vet policy cycle (for organisations who can potentially contribute (i.e. are not yet contributing) to the VET policy cycle). This section contained questions to gather information on the potential contribution of the organisation to the VET policy cycle.

The full questionnaire is provided in Annex 1.

⁸ Two countries of the region were not included in the sample, namely Syria and Egypt. The reasons for this are that ETF operations in Syria have been suspended during the hostilities, and time constraints prevented dealing with the regulations and procedures in place to engage with the civil society in Egypt.

Rollout

In order to reach the 'niche' group of CSOs working on VET, multiple channels were used in parallel for the rollout of the e-survey. As a preparatory task, which produced the first tangible deliverable of this initiative, the ETF created a database of contacts comprising around 200 organisations working in the fields of VET, lifelong learning and employment. This database was developed by building on the ETF's existing contacts in the countries concerned.

First, the survey was sent out by email to the database contacts in the respective countries. Second, the Anna Lindh Foundation joined forces with the ETF and approached its vast network of CSO contacts in the same countries. In addition, the delegations of the EU in each of the countries distributed the survey through their respective networks. At the same time, a social media campaign was launched via Facebook and Twitter.

Response rate

By the closing date, 85 organisations from seven countries had completed the survey. However, as the CSO database the ETF created in-house is not exhaustive for the seven countries, the results cannot be generalised for the whole CSOs group in the region.

The social media campaign generated a high level of interest for the survey (several thousand read the posts and they received hundreds of reactions), but did not lead to many completed contributions. This might be related to the length and complexity of the questionnaire.

While many CSOs are providing a number of vocational training activities and are forging links with the labour market, many see themselves as social actors (often with a specific target group of beneficiaries in mind, such as vulnerable youth) rather than VET-specific organisations. The demarcation might not always be clear, but this survey was specifically addressed to CSOs active in the VET field and filtered out organisations that did not consider VET as their core business.

Although the overall numbers were limited, the response rate was considered reasonable given the 'niche' target group and the rather technical nature of the questionnaire presented to the respondents. The survey is not intended to be statistically representative, yet the number of responses provides good indicative results on the situation of CSOs in the region and their involvement in the VET policy cycle.

1.2 Focus groups

To better understand how CSOs contribute to the success of VET, a focus group was organised in Tunis with a number of CSOs. This focus group's aim was to gather information on the role of CSOs in VET, continuing education and employability support, and to aggregate the mostly quantitative data collected through the online survey.

The focus group took place in November 2018 in the offices of the Startup Haus in Tunis, with a dozen representatives of Tunisian civil society active in the fields of VET, employability and entrepreneurship or managing other programmes aimed at facilitating the transition of certain specific groups into the labour market.

The results of this discussion are referred to throughout this report. Where relevant, a number of quotes taken from the exchanges that took place are transcribed here. However, for the sake of data protection, these are reproduced without naming the specific participant CSO. Although they related to the specific VET context in that country, the Tunisian experiences contributed to the overall picture of the sector in the SEMED region. Viewed alongside the e-survey results, the Tunisian focus group

discussions help to contextualise some of the dynamics around the CSOs' involvement in VET policies in the region.

To further enrich the picture with respect to understanding the contribution of CSOs, an interview was conducted with Yousef Shalian, President of the NGO-VET league in Palestine, in November 2018 in Jerusalem. The full transcript of this exchange is provided in Annex 2.

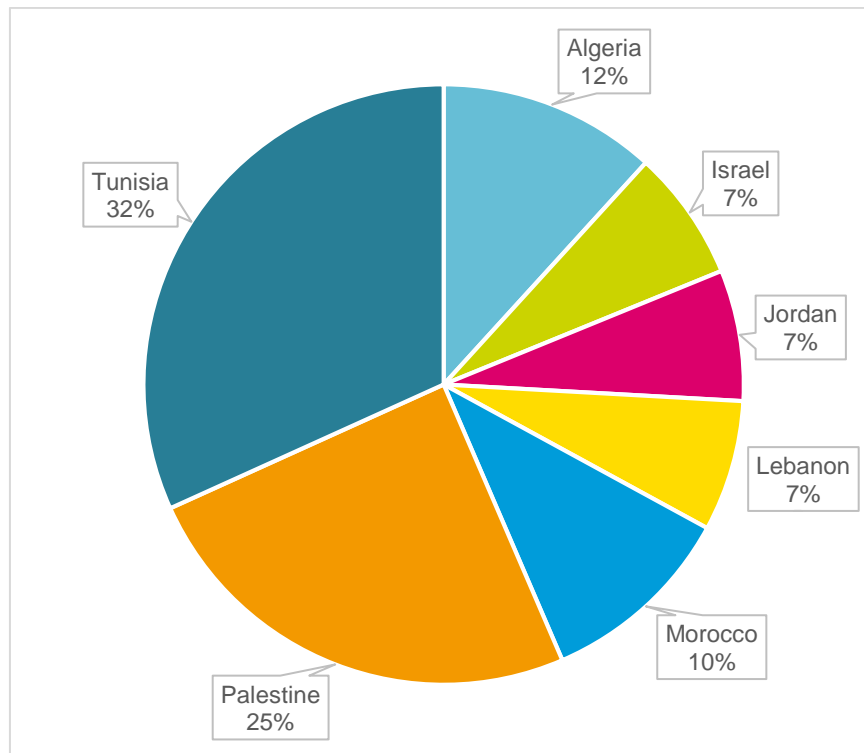
2. MAIN CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SURVEY SAMPLE

This chapter describes the main characteristics of the survey sample, providing a picture of the CSO respondents in the SEMED region, their operational scope and their respective funding sources.

2.1 Geographic distribution

Out of the total number of valid answers, more than half came from participants in two countries, namely Tunisia (32%) and Palestine (25%), with the rest of the responses relatively equally distributed among the remaining countries.

FIGURE 2.1 DISTRIBUTION OF E-SURVEY ANSWERS PER COUNTRY (N = 85)



Although a similar approach was used for the rollout of the survey in each of the respective countries, the responses of two countries stand out. Given the unknown overall target group, there is no clear explanation for this; however, the existence of a structured network/platform for CSOs (the so-called NGO-VET league) in Palestine and the active participation of the Anna Lindh Foundation in Tunisia might have impacted on the dissemination of the survey in these two countries.

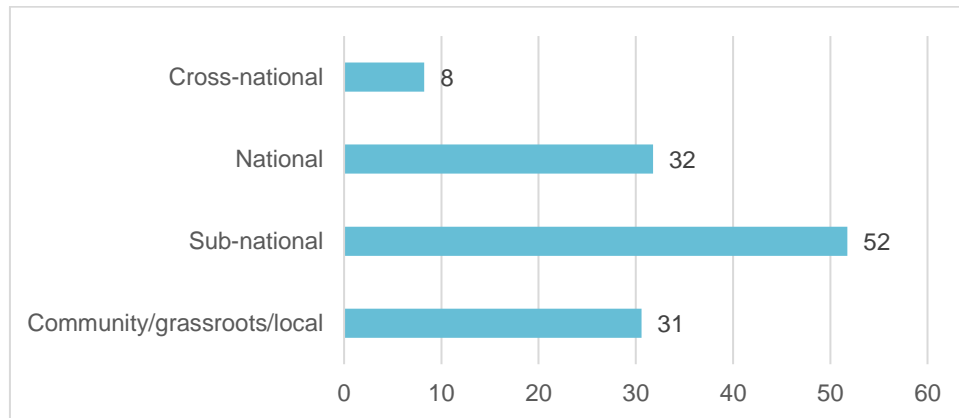
This uneven geographic spread was taken into account in the analysis, although most trends were seen as general and reconfirmed for all the countries, unless stated otherwise.

2.2 Scope

When questioned about the scope of their organisation's work, the majority of the surveyed CSOs stated that they were active at the sub-national (regional) level. One-third worked at grassroots (community) level, while another third operated at the national level. Only 8% reported that their organisation operated at the international level (working across different countries). This proximity to

their beneficiaries at the grassroots level or their embedding at the sub-national level was confirmed through the focus group discussion in Tunisia.

FIGURE 2.2 OPERATIONAL LEVEL OF CSOs (N = 85) (%)

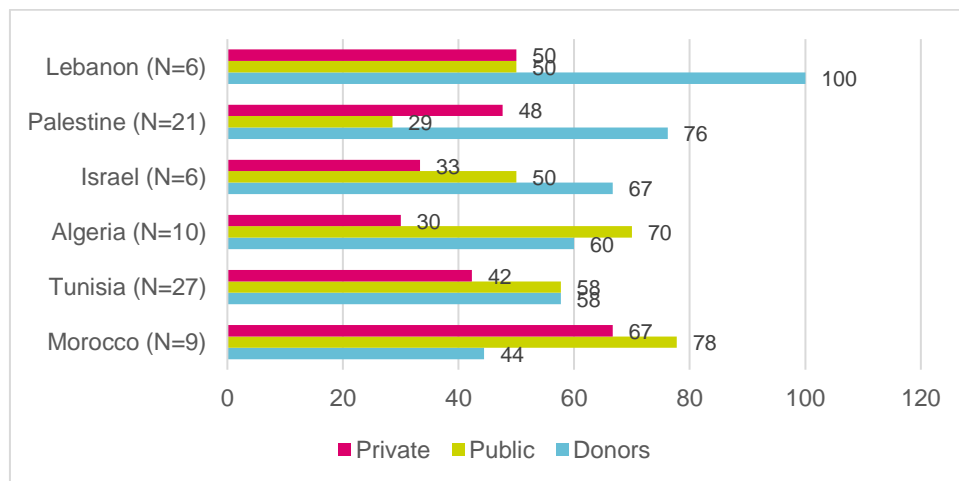


2.3 Funding sources

To understand the funding sources of the CSOs active in the VET field, the survey included a question on how they financed their activities. Two out of three organisations receive donor funding (65%), while just over half of them work with government funds (e.g. grants, public calls) (51%). In contrast, less than half of the organisations rely on private funds collected through, for example, fund-raising campaigns (43%) or private donations such as crowd funding (21%).

In the sample, two distinct geographic groups became apparent when looking at sources of funding (leaving Jordan out of the equation because of the small number of responses). Respondents from the Mashreq states worked mostly with donor funding, while, in contrast, more than half of the CSOs in the Maghreb region benefitted from government grants.

FIGURE 2.3 FUNDING SOURCE PER COUNTRY (%)



3. CSOs' CONTRIBUTION TO IMPLEMENTATION OF TRAINING PROVISION AND MONITORING

This chapter describes the contribution of CSOs to implementation of training provision and monitoring, by identifying their main activities as service providers of training programmes and related services, as well as by identifying the beneficiaries targeted by CSOs active in the VET field.

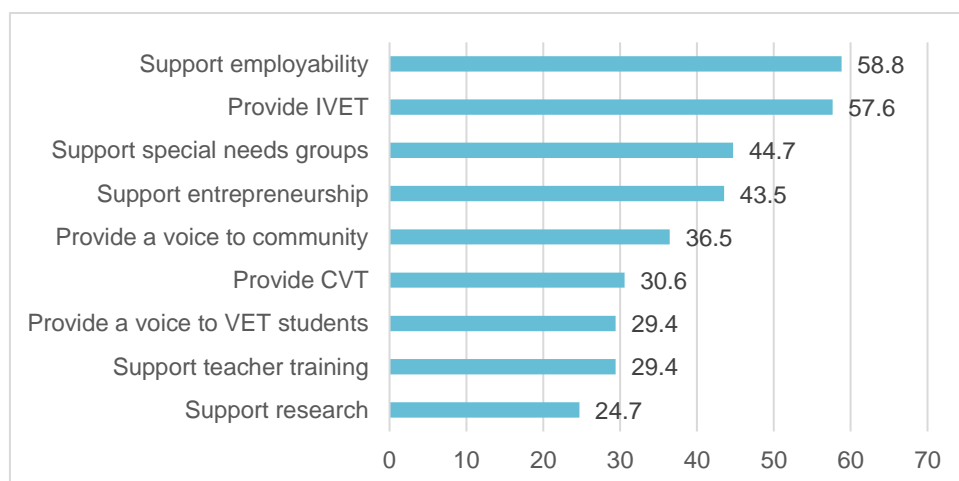
Implementation is the main area we associate with CSOs, and also where they are most visible, working closely with beneficiaries. In the theoretical concept of the VET policy cycle (as described in the Introduction), the implementation phase comes second, but it is brought forward here as the CSOs are often mostly characterised by such activities.

3.1 Main activities

The CSO organisations surveyed were very active in a variety of initiatives related to VET, for example the provision of targeted training, identifying needs related to training areas, supporting target groups for job creation and coaching. Their role and contribution were clear and evident during this implementation phase of VET-related activities.

When asked what their main activity was in the field of VET, the answers that stood out were supporting employability and providing initial VET (both close to 60%), followed by supporting specific needs groups (e.g. vulnerable youth, the unemployed, migrants and/or refugees, people with disabilities) and encouraging entrepreneurship (44.7% and 43.5% respectively), and well before other activities such as giving a voice to the community (36.5%) or to VET students (29.4%), offering continuing VET (CVET) (31%), or supporting teacher training (29.4%) or research (24.7%).

FIGURE 3.1 MAIN ACTIVITY OF CSOs (N = 85) (%)

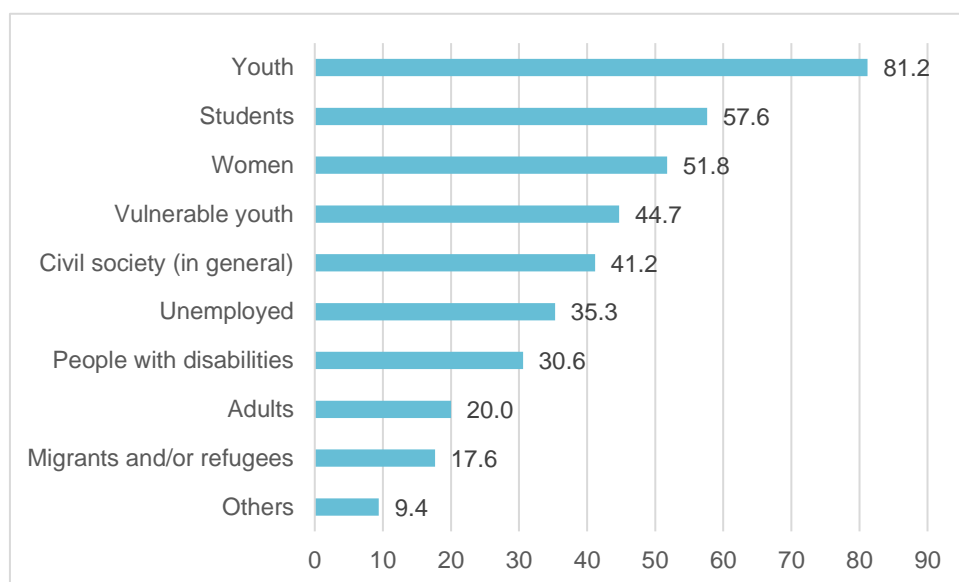


Overall, these responses correspond to the common perceptions of CSOs' activities in terms of VET provision. Moreover, they were confirmed in the responses to a number of similar questions throughout the survey, with initial training provision, employment services and targeting special needs groups topping the charts. More surprisingly, perhaps, entrepreneurship was always mentioned in the top five activities. Continuous training and lifelong learning, on the other hand, were not considered priorities, nor was monitoring and evaluation, research or policy advice.

3.2 Beneficiaries

According to the survey results, proximity to the beneficiaries plays a central role in the work of the CSOs active in VET. The specific requirements of the beneficiaries often determined the core activities of the CSOs in response to local needs. The embedding of the CSO within its particular beneficiary group was in some cases also seen as one of the organisation's founding principles, as was further explained by some Tunisian CSOs in the focus group.

FIGURE 3.2 BENEFICIARIES OF CSOs (N = 85) (%)



Some 81.2% of the organisations that responded, named young people as their main beneficiaries. This focus is not surprising, considering that around 40% of the total population of the SEMED region are under the age of 25, while high levels of youth unemployment along with a difficult transition from school to work are prevalent in the area. Hence more than half of the organisations (57.6%) confirmed that they dealt with students, in either a formal or non-formal training setting, while 44.7% focused specifically on 'vulnerable youth' groups. Furthermore, just over half of the respondents declared that they specifically addressed the training needs of women (51.8%).

Although, overall, the CSOs underlined that they provided training for the most vulnerable groups (see the main activities, above), the survey revealed a rather surprisingly low response rate in terms of addressing the training needs of specific vulnerable groups such as the unemployed (35.3%), people with disabilities (30.6%), adult learners (20%) and migrants and/or refugees (17.6%).

Analysing these figures in the light of the CSOs' sources of funding, the same trends apply for all types of financial support with the exception of CSOs in receipt of with donor funds. Over three-quarters of those who declared that they worked with the unemployed, people with disabilities, adults, migrants and/or refugees, were operating with the support of donor funding, suggesting that it is the donor agenda in particular that caters for these groups.

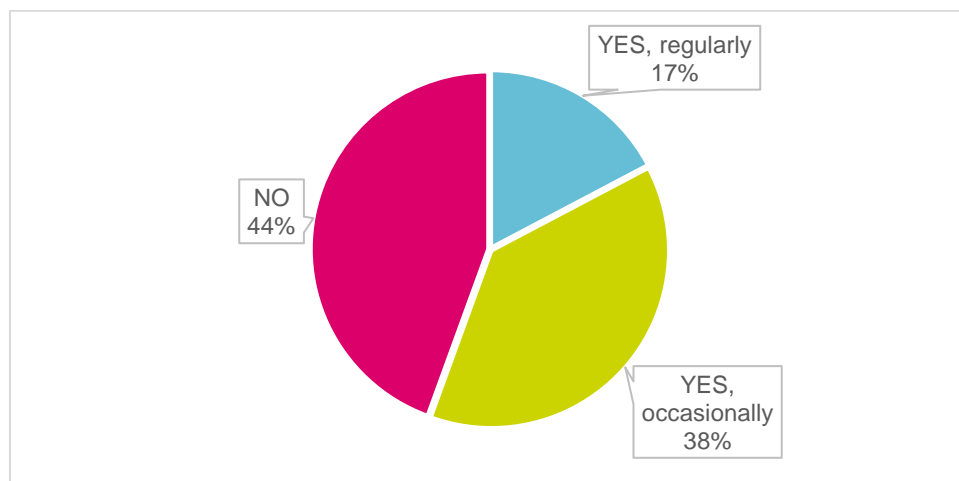
4. CSOs' CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGY FORMULATION AND POLICY DESIGN

This chapter aims to develop an understanding of CSOs' participation in VET policy-making beyond the role of civil society groups as service providers. To this end, the survey contained a set of questions referring to the participation of the organisation in the dialogue concerning VET, its main institutional counterparts, and its contribution to the VET policy cycle. The research thus sought to understand the extent to which CSOs are recognised as valuable actors with a role to play in the strategic dimension of the VET policy cycle.

4.1 Do CSOs have a seat at the VET table?

When this question was put to the CSOs in the SEMED region, almost half of the surveyed organisations (44%) declared that they were not consulted on VET dialogue and policies. Nevertheless, this means that the majority (55%) did claim to have a seat at the table where VET policies are made. Most of these consultations, however, happened on an ad-hoc basis (i.e. 'occasionally' 38%), while a smaller percentages of CSOs were consulted on a regular basis (17%).

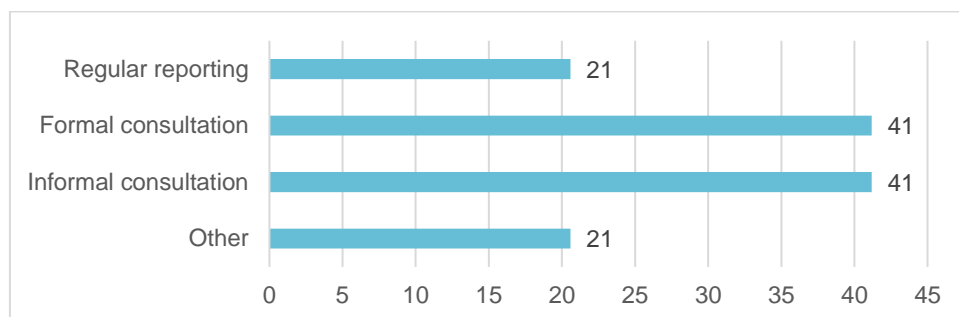
FIGURE 4.1 CSOs' CONSULTATION ON VET POLICIES (N = 81)



Those who were consulted were first and foremost interacting with government institutions (such as Ministries of Education, Labour, Economy and Social Affairs), any other public authority at the national, regional or local level, and/or a governmental executive or supervisory agency (87%). To a lesser extent they reported being engaged with CSO platforms (51%), VET providers (44%) and academic institutions (40%), followed by national employment offices (33%) or employers (23%), while trade unions were (surprisingly) rarely mentioned as a key interlocutor (just 13%).

When asked a follow-up question, those who had not been consulted cited the following main reasons for their exclusion from the VET policy table: (a) the limited involvement of non-state and private actors; (b) the lack of an appropriate network to facilitate an inclusive dialogue among parties; and (c) the relevant parties were not clearly identified.

FIGURE 4.2 MODES OF CSOs' CONTRIBUTION TO THE VET DIALOGUE (N = 68) (%)



Among the CSOs who claimed to be consulted, in terms of the mode of consultation the answers were evenly split between those who were formally or informally consulted (41% each). A smaller percentage (21%) reported that they had a regular reporting line to the policy fora.

These trends were confirmed by the focus group discussion with CSO representatives in Tunisia. When questions regarding their role in VET sector dialogue and their contribution in terms of policy formulation were addressed, it was made clear that CSOs were not involved or considered in a systematic or structured way.

The participation of CSOs in discussions relating to either strategy formulation or policy reform was carried out informally and often through the networks and personal connections of the organisation's members. This shows that this part of the VET policy cycle is (still) partitioned at the level of governments (ministries and public institutions) and the regular (tripartite) stakeholders, and that it does not yet allow for the active contribution of civil society, notwithstanding their members' knowledge of grassroots training provision and their proximity to the beneficiaries.

4.2 The role of civil society in the political dialogue

The involvement of organisations in decision-making thus depends on several factors and is far from systematic. One of the CSOs in Tunisia noted that they always make an effort to be present at policy debates, and that they find themselves knocking on doors and being careful to maintain good relations with other actors in the field in order to contribute to the VET dialogue. For other organisations, however, relations with the public administration were essentially irregular and subject to disruption.

In general, when a CSO is granted a role in the VET dialogue and policy-making phase, this contribution is limited to the lower (more accessible) levels of public administration, namely local government or universities and employment offices.

The extent of CSOs' role in the VET dialogue may also depend on people rather than strategies. In Tunisia, for example, some decision-makers at ministry level seem inclined to use certain organisations and not others, which confirms the importance of personal relationships (or political affiliations) in the consultation process. However, the reputation of an organisation (based on its work in the field) also plays an important part in determining its involvement in decision-making.

It is relevant to mention that when they are starting out, organisations feel they need to make a considerable effort to gain access to the government. However, it is only once the organisation has proved itself by gaining experience in various areas⁹ and through local public structures that it can attain the higher position required to engage with powers at the ministerial level. As one participant put it: 'The organisations are patient.'

4.3 The influence of policy-makers and advocacy

About one in three of the surveyed CSOs stated that they were able to provide input into policy formulation (e.g. by identifying information gaps prior to policy formulation). What is interesting to note is that this contribution rises to almost one in two for the respondents working at the national level.

The role of CSOs as 'influencers' in the policy environment and as key actors in terms of advocacy clearly has its limitations. As their involvement is not systematic, formal or institutionalised, their ability to influence VET policies is unclear. It would seem that 'organisations have created their own way', meaning that they act in parallel with governments rather than as partners with government agencies.

At the discussion in Tunisia, the organisations shared the view that they nevertheless tend to succeed in somehow making their voices heard in representing their target beneficiaries. Some organisations try to do this through influencing members of the Parliament whom they know personally, thereby trying to reach the Council of Ministers through parliament. Some have succeeded through formal channels – for example, by writing policy papers that have been taken up and found their way into laws – while others attempt to reach a wider group of influential people, even making contacts in the private sector (with large investors, for example). One of the participants gave an example of having organised a sit-in to raise awareness and attract the attention of decision-makers.

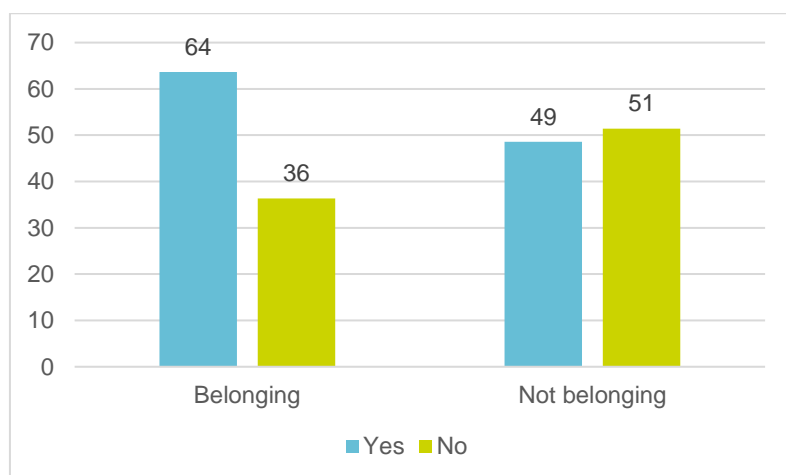
4.4 Networking/CSO platforms

When trying to understand what factors might enhance the participation of CSOs in VET policy dialogue, it is interesting to see that 'belonging to a network or not' might make the most difference. In its recent conclusions on engagement with civil society in external relations, the Council of the European Union underlined the importance of establishing the necessary operating space and mechanisms for civil society to engage in a political and policy dialogue with the EU. In this respect, it welcomes agreements with networks of CSOs and hails the positive impact that these long-term strategic partnerships can bring (Council of the European Union, 2017).

In considering the results of the e-survey, the importance of CSOs' networks should not be underestimated. While, overall, a slight majority of organisations confirmed that they had been consulted on VET policy development, the picture changes when responses are disaggregated by membership of a network. The rate of consultation among CSOs rises to two-thirds for those who have organised themselves into a network, and drops below 50% for those who have not.

⁹ When looking at CSOs' involvement in VET dialogue, most of them were contributing to entrepreneurial skills development (60%), the identification of labour market needs (47%), and the quality of training provision (53%). By contrast, CVET and adult education did not seem to be priority areas for CSOs' contributions to the VET dialogue (around one-third of CSOs answered affirmatively concerning engagement in these areas, depending on the question). This casts doubt on the assumption that CSOs play a leading role in the areas of non-formal education and lifelong learning.

FIGURE 4.3 CSOs' CONTRIBUTION TO THE VET POLICY DIALOGUE BY THEIR BELONGING TO A NETWORK OR NOT (N = 79) (%)



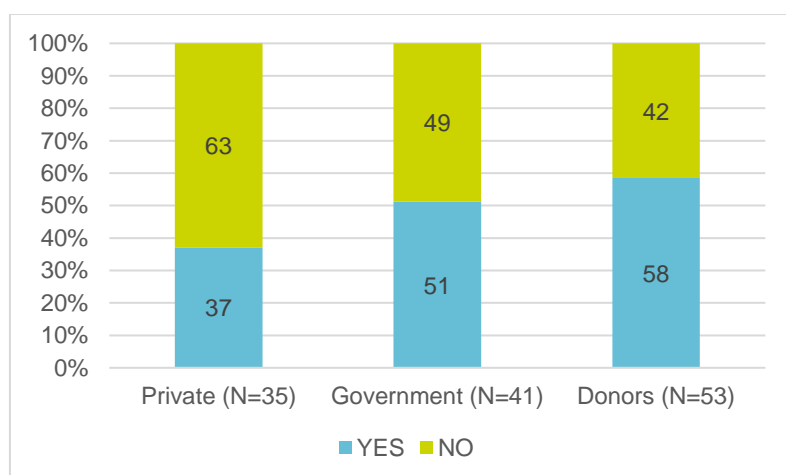
This could be explained by the fact that CSOs see themselves as more powerful when they belong to a network. On the other hand, a more pragmatic reason could be that governments need to have a specific interlocutor to deal with rather than fragmented organisations working in different regions on various topics. Being part of a consolidated network also reinforces CSOs' credibility.

The NGO-VET league in Palestine could serve as a clear example of how a network of NGOs can not only enhance the dialogue but also create a structure for occupying a seat at the policy table. As its president put it: 'Where individual CSOs and the NGO-VET league have always been part and parcel of the debates [in Palestine], the consultations are now consolidated and in a formalised environment. We see this as a recognition of our active role in the policy dialogue.'

4.5 Does having rich friends matter?

When disaggregated by funding source, a wide gap became apparent in terms of participation in the VET policy dialogue. Where organisations working with government funds seem to follow, more or less, the overall trend in terms of consultation (51% contributed to the VET dialogue), a wider gap exists between CSOs relying on private funds (37%) and those operating with donor funding (58%). This seems to confirm that having rich friends matters. Having access to donor funding might secure you a seat at the VET dialogue table, whereas relying on small contributions limits your chances of influencing the debate.

FIGURE 4.4 CSOs' CONTRIBUTION TO THE VET POLICY DIALOGUE BY FUNDING SOURCE (%)



During the focus group in Tunisia, the participants confirmed that being part of a donor-funded project can secure you a seat at the table where policies are formulated. This engagement could be directly linked to the implementation of the particular CSO's project activities. Alternatively, when an international donor implements a civil society support programme, they might, for example, involve CSOs in their strategic discussions with the government. In other cases, the invitation to the policy arena comes later, as a result of credibility gained through the implementation of donor-funded projects.

The experience of the NGO Association d'appui aux initiatives de développement (AID) in Tunisia confirms this trend. According to the head of the organisation, it is the quality of the work provided by AID, together with its fieldwork, which justifies their role in consultations with the government – discussions that cover different fields and subjects related to development in general and VET in particular.

As a specific example, AID was in regular contact with governmental institutions through the implementation of a long-term, multi-donor project (2013–16) on improving the employability of young people in remote areas of Tunisia through business creation. While the collaboration with the relevant public offices throughout the implementation of the project was not without challenges, the synergy between the organisation and the public institutions was mutually beneficial and key to the success of vocational training and employability support: one side provided knowledge of the field and proximity, while the other supplied data, techniques and the expertise of its staff. Moreover, building on their experience in this project, AID gained the opportunity to be represented in different public consultations, including at conferences, workshops and focus groups, and even at restricted ministerial council meetings. As one member put it: 'In the end what counts is the relationship and the fieldwork'.

5. CSOs' CONTRIBUTION TO POLICY EVALUATION AND REVIEW

This chapter aims to develop an understanding of CSOs' role in evaluating and reviewing VET policies. Overall, civil society plays a key role in the policy arena through promoting transparency and accountability, while ensuring inclusive and effective policy implementation and service delivery. However, in response to the e-survey questions on this aspect of their engagement, the CSOs active in the VET sector in the SEMED region gave less conclusive answers.

Less than a quarter of the respondents to the e-survey stated that they had contributed to 'monitoring training provision (e.g. by assessing local or students' needs through consultations at the school and local level, such as questionnaires, etc.)' and only 15% had contributed to 'evaluating policy implementation (e.g. by consulting local society such as students, parents, in order to understand the impact of policies)'. However, it is noteworthy that this response rate doubles for the group of organisations working at the national level (50%). In contrast with the vast majority of CSOs active at sub-national or grassroots levels (29% or 20%), those at the national level seem to be better placed to exercise a monitoring function. The evaluation of policy implementation followed a similar trend (23% versus 4% and 14% respectively).

One of the reasons given for this limited engagement was the lack of communication channels. On this topic, Tunisian CSOs were very clear: 'We always must seek information on VET ourselves'. It was clear from the discussion that organisations have to turn to government structures for information. Communication channels are sometimes based on personal knowledge and do not necessarily refer to any structured or systematic approach on the part of the institutions.

CSOs active in VET provision do not seem to be involved in the evaluation phase of public programmes or the implementation of policies. The participants in the focus group discussion in Tunisia confirmed that they did not have the tools or the information to perform this function, nor the know-how to carry out an exhaustive evaluation process. In addition, the organisations may have shared some of their opinions on VET policies with the government, but this feedback was not necessarily taken into account.

6. ADDED VALUE OF CSOs IN THE VOCATIONAL EDUCATION ECOSYSTEM

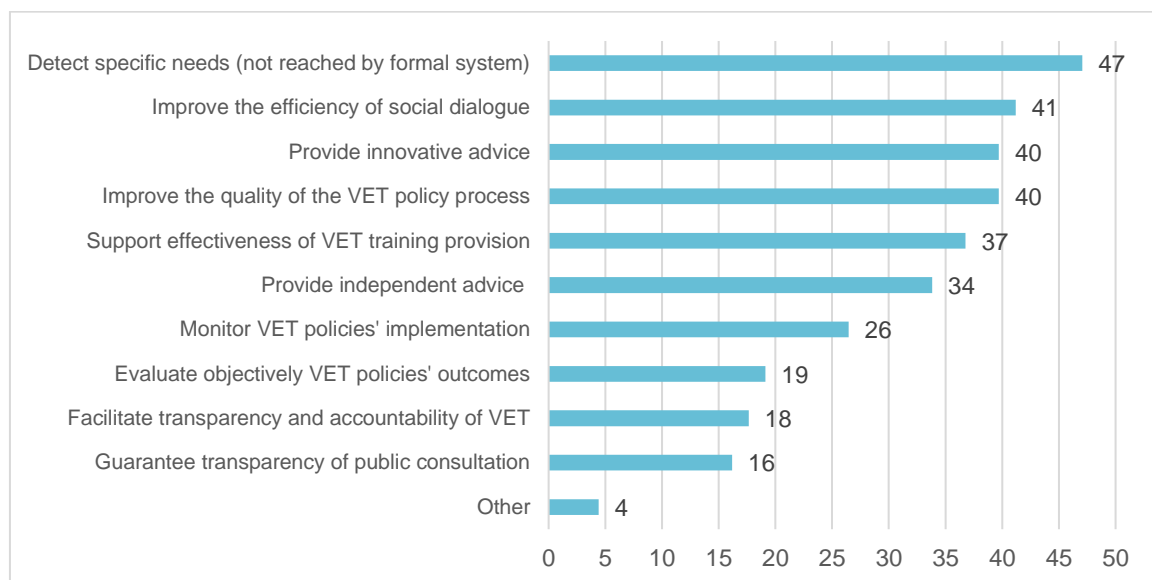
This chapter analyses the overall added value of CSOs in the VET ecosystem, and aims to identify the core benefits that they bring to the table in the VET policy cycle.

6.1 Added value

When the CSOs were asked to identify the added value of their contribution to the VET policy cycle, four key benefits emerged, namely: detecting special needs (not reached by the system) (47%); improving social dialogue (41%); providing innovative advice (40%); and improving the quality of the VET policy process (40%).

On the other hand, as mentioned in Chapter 5, the CSOs in the SEMED region rated their contribution in terms of objective evaluation (19%), facilitating transparency and accountability (18%), and guaranteeing transparency in public consultations (16%) as surprising low.

FIGURE 6.1 ADDED VALUE OF CSOs' CONTRIBUTION TO THE VET POLICY DIALOGUE (N = 68) (%)



In the focus group in Tunisia, a lively debate took place on the assumption that CSOs are better placed to add value than, for example, public actors in the field of VET. While recognising that other actors also might have their advantages, the types of added value that CSOs provide in terms of formulating useful proposals for the reform of existing VET policies or by implementing training, employment services or entrepreneurship programmes, were brought together under four main headings: proximity, credibility, relevance and quality/innovation.

Proximity

Many of the participants' responses during the focus group in Tunisia underlined the importance of proximity. As the majority of the CSOs are embedded either at the grassroots or sub-national level, they mostly 'have a better knowledge of [the] target population' than others actors and often 'they know how to speak the language of young people'. This closeness to the beneficiaries also gives CSOs an added value in terms of their ability to carry out a systematic analysis of the terrain, putting them in a better position to undertake 'participatory research to define the needs of beneficiaries'.

Their proximity to the beneficiaries also provides them with an edge in terms of offering individualised assistance (beyond the reach of the public administration or through a better cost-benefit ratio).

Credibility

Linked to proximity, another key benefit to come out of the focus group discussion was credibility. The beneficiaries often associate themselves with the representatives of the grassroots organisations, they 'see themselves in them' or 'believe they keep their promises'. Credibility obviously depends on the organisation, but elements such as 'close communication' and 'trust' were cited as key characteristics in the relationship with the beneficiaries. Thus, the second most highly rated added value characteristic, to 'improve the efficiency of social dialogue', can be understood in this context.

Relevance

Another important factor that gives CSOs an advantage in the provision of training and employability support services is their flexibility and adaptability: the CSOs 'listen to their beneficiaries and implement projects that are adapted to their needs and demands'. The organisations confirmed that their training was adapted to the needs of their beneficiaries through participatory diagnostic exercises and the design of action plans, thereby reinforcing the most popular response of the e-survey in terms of adding value: detecting the 'special needs of groups not reached by the formal system and bringing their voice to the policy dialogue'.

One of the organisations present shared an example in which 'young people had lost hope in the public training providers and [...] they turn to the CSOs to address their training needs, which are more reliable in terms of programming'. While another respondent claimed: 'CSOs address root causes more than the consequences'.

Quality/innovation

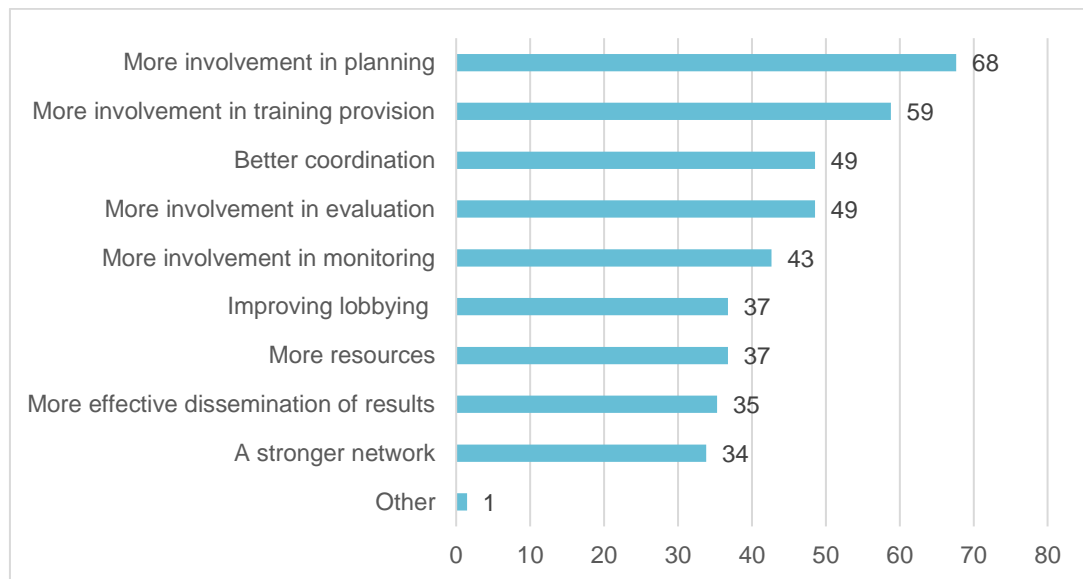
The third most highly rated added value identified by CSOs according to the e-survey responses was to 'improve the quality of VET policy processes', closely followed by supporting the 'effectiveness of VET training provision'. However, this does not necessarily mean that CSOs provide better quality training. The quality issue gave rise to a debate in the focus group in Tunisia, where some claimed that the training offered by some organisations in certain niches, would be of a higher quality than that which is provided by public structures. Some participants insisted that the role of civil society should be complementary to that of the government in the field of vocational training, with each focusing on its areas of comparative advantage, for example the adaptability of CSOs in terms of their lower accessibility thresholds and ability to provide more flexible, localised, non-formal training, contrasted with the pedagogical foundations of the public VET training provision.

With regard to innovation, it was noted that organisations have the capacity to experiment with training methods in, for example, e-learning. As such they 'provide innovative advice to shape VET policies'. In addition, organisations focus on feedback from participants, and CSOs tend to learn from their experiences on the ground. For most of the organisations, evaluations were automatically conducted at the end of the activities or the implementation of training programmes.

The pioneering role of CSOs also emerged from the interview with the representative of the Palestinian VET league, which underlined the added value of non-governmental actors in terms of scaling up a number of innovative training programmes that had been spearheaded at CSO level, later to be mainstreamed at VET policy level.

6.2 Room for improvement

FIGURE 6.2 POTENTIAL FOR IMPROVEMENT OF THE RELEVANCE OF CSOs' CONTRIBUTION TO THE VET POLICY CYCLE (N = 68) (%)



When questioned about possible room for improvement in their contribution to the VET policy cycle, the response that stood out most clearly was 'more involvement in the planning phase' (68%). This follows the analysis in Chapter 4, which showed that a significant number of CSOs claimed to contribute to the planning and policy phase of VET. With CSOs' above-mentioned trump cards of bringing proximity, credibility, relevance and quality to the table, it is fair to state that an enhanced CSO contribution could be beneficial for the VET policy environment. This could be further reinforced by 'better coordination with policy makers', the third item on the CSOs' wish list (49%). Last but not least, CSOs also expressed their hope of becoming more involved in the 'evaluation' (49%) and 'monitoring' (43%) of VET.

In Chapter 3, the involvement of CSOs in VET in terms of providing training, labour market services and (not least) support for entrepreneurship has been described in more detail. Nevertheless, the respondents to the e-survey saw 'more involvement in training provision' (59%) as the second highest potential area for improvement.

It is noteworthy that the top five items in this list of aspirations are all related to CSOs wishing to play a greater role in the various aspects of the VET policy cycle, namely planning, provision, coordination, and monitoring and evaluation. These ambitions all come well ahead of the desire to have more resources or to improve lobbying (both 37%).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Regardless of the concise scope of this research (which comprised an e-survey carried out in seven SEMED countries, a focus group discussion in Tunisia and an interview in Palestine), the state of play of CSOs' involvement in the different phases of the VET policy cycle in the region is quite clear.

CSOs have a recognised and valuable part to play as non-state actors with regard to VET policy shaping, just as they do in implementing high-quality, innovative and relevant VET training and providing employment activities in the region. By contrast, the role of CSOs in terms of reviewing training provision and holding the public VET service providers to account is clearly underdeveloped in the region.

Moreover, CSOs are eager to play an additional role in all stages of the VET policy cycle. This is key to further understanding the involvement of CSOs and to raising awareness regarding the added value that they offer, especially in terms of policy shaping.

Implementation

The CSOs appeared to be making considerable efforts to provide training and employment services to target populations (mostly young people) unaffected by the state's public structures, or to design employment and entrepreneurship support at the grassroots level or programmes tailored to specific niche groups. They thus see themselves as credible partners (having a specific added value in terms of adaptability and proximity) in VET provision, and would like to be recognised as key actors in the sector.

In the context of human capital development, the non-formal training modalities that CSOs provide are becoming increasingly important for adult education and supporting employability in a lifelong learning perspective. However, in the SEMED region so far, CVET does not seem to be part of the core business of CSOs. In addition, specific needs groups, such as people with disabilities, migrants or refugees, are less well represented than expected in the work of CSOs in the VET field. Nevertheless, CSOs did claim to offer an added value in terms of bringing the needs of such groups to the fore. This ambiguity might be related to the fact that these specific needs groups are the focus of niche CSOs, on which further research would be required to better understand this aspect of their remit.

Planning/dialogue

With barely half of the CSOs having access to the fora where VET policies are made, their contribution in this respect is scattered and all too often dependent on personal relationships. Their input could thus be enhanced if organised in a more systematic and structured way through formal communication channels. While involvement in strategic planning is, at present, more likely to occur for organisations represented at the national level, it is those CSOs working at the grassroots level that can bring proximity, credibility, relevance and quality/innovation to the VET policy debates.

More than a desire for additional funding, the CSOs' main aspirations were given as increasing their contribution to the VET planning process and playing a greater role in an effective partnership where their contribution in a multi-stakeholder environment was recognised.

Two success factors emerged out of the research: (a) implementing donor-supported programmes; and (b) membership of a CSO network. Being active in both of these areas seems likely to boost CSO participation in the VET policy environment. In the case of Palestine, it even led to the formalised representation of CSOs at the highest VET policy forum.

Review/evaluation

In contrast to common expectations of civil society as executing a ‘watchdog’ function in the policy environment, CSOs active in VET in the SEMED region do not seem to play an active role in terms of reviewing the sector’s performance or holding the public service providers to account. The CSOs surveyed stated that they aspired to play a bigger role here, but further analysis is required in this area. A lack of information was one of the main reasons given for this lack of evaluation on the part of CSOs; hence, improved communication channels could enhance this function.

Recommendations

Based on the above, two sets of recommendations can be made. The first aims at raising awareness around the demonstrated added value that CSOs already bring to sector and how they could be contributing even more if allowed into the VET policy arena. The second proposal focuses on developing a wider understanding of CSOs’ involvement in the VET policy cycle through continued research.

To further enhance the contribution of CSOs to the VET policy cycle, the ETF recommends raising awareness in the following areas:

- the added value CSOs bring to the VET policy dialogue, namely in terms proximity, credibility, relevance and quality/innovation;
- the importance of structuring CSOs’ participation in the VET policy cycle beyond ad-hoc contributions and ideally within a formal network;
- the importance of the donor community supporting CSOs and involving them in the provision of both training and employment services, as well as including them in strategic discussions around VET policies.

To further develop an understanding of CSOs’ contribution to the VET policy cycle, the ETF suggests continuing the research into such organisations’ role in the VET policy cycle in a wider number of regions, and specifically:

- undertaking a 360 degrees analysis of the added value of the contribution made by CSOs, including a wider survey of stakeholders, incorporating both public and private actors at the national, regional and grassroots levels;
- studying CSOs’ targeting of specific needs groups, ranging from the well-represented category of vulnerable youth to those who are seemingly underrepresented, for example the unemployed, adults, people with disabilities, migrants and refugees;
- distinguishing VET CSOs within the larger environment of organisations with a wider social mandate (and a potential specific focus on special needs groups), and identifying their distinctive qualities.

ANNEXES

Annex 1. E-survey on the contribution of civil society organisations to the vocational education and training policy

Introduction

Welcome to the e-survey on the contribution of civil society organisations (CSOs) to vocational education and training (VET) policy development, implementation and review. Developments in vocational education and skills, more generally, intersect social, economic and labour market policies, and impact young people, adults, the employed and the unemployed. Governments establish dialogue and cooperation with social partners and CSOs to respond to the diverse needs through formal and non-formal learning across the country.

How do CSOs contribute to successful VET and skills development? The purpose of this survey, conducted across the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean region, is to collect information regarding the role of CSOs in:

- IVET – vocational education and training at an initial stage (school-based, work-based, etc.);
- CVET – continuing vocational education and training (training and re-training for the employed, the unemployed, migrants, etc.); lifelong learning;
- support to employability (measures to support youth, migrants, vulnerable groups, non-formal learners, etc.; career guidance activities; etc.).

Explanatory notes

Structure of the questionnaire

The questionnaire is structured in four sections.

Section A: organisation profile (for all respondents)	This section contains questions about the main characteristics of your organisation (size, sector, field of activity, etc.).
Section B: participation in the VET dialogue and VET policy cycle (for organisations active in the VET/employability fields)	This section contains questions referring to the participation of the organisation in the VET dialogue, the main institutional counterparts, and the organisation's contribution to the VET policy cycle.
Section C: current input to the VET policy cycle (for organisations contributing to the VET policy cycle)	This section contains questions about the content of the organisation's contribution to the VET policy cycle.
Section D: potential input to the VET policy cycle (for organisations who can potentially contribute (i.e. not contributing yet) to the VET policy cycle)	This section contains questions that gather information on the potential contribution of the organisation to the VET policy cycle.

Type of questions

In the questionnaire you will find the following type of questions:

Single choice questions	You can choose only one possible answer.
Multiple choice questions	You can choose one or more answers (all applicable ones).
Open questions	In some cases you are requested to write your answer (i.e. if not listed in the options proposed), or to provide further information (e.g. 'Please specify').

Questionnaire

SECTION A: ORGANISATION PROFILE

This section contains questions about the **main characteristics** of your organisation (size, sector, field of activity, etc.).

A1. Please select your location

(single choice)

- ☐ 1. Algeria
- ☐ 2. Israel
- ☐ 3. Jordan
- ☐ 4. Lebanon
- ☐ 5. Morocco
- ☐ 6. Palestine
- ☐ 7. Tunisia

A2. At what level does your organisation operate?

(multiple choice)

- ☐ 1. Community/grassroots/local
- ☐ 2. Sub-national (e.g. regions within country)
- ☐ 3. National
- ☐ 4. Cross-national (i.e. in different countries) (go to A2.1)

A2.1 If operating at cross-national level, which are the other countries?

(please provide a list)

A3. Does your organisation belong to a network?

(single choice)

- ☐ 1. Yes (go to A3.1)
- ☐ 2. No

A3.1 If YES, please specify the name of the network: _____

A4. Does your organisation have a website?

(single choice)

- ☐ 1. Yes (go to A4.1)
- ☐ 2. No

A4.1 If YES, please write the web address (URL):

A5. How many employees work in your organisation? Reply for your organisation only, not the network.

(single choice)

- ☐ 1. Fewer than 5
- ☐ 2. Between 5 and 20
- ☐ 3. Between 20 and 100
- ☐ 4. More than 100

A6. How do you finance your activities?

(multiple choice)

- ☐ 1. Private funds (e.g. fund-raising campaigns)
- ☐ 2. Governmental funds (e.g. grants, public calls)
- ☐ 3. Donors funds
- ☐ 4. Private donations (e.g. crowdfunding)
- ☐ 5. Other (please specify)

A7. What is the (main) activity of your organisation in the field of vocational education and training (initial or continuous) and/or employability?

(multiple choice)

- ☐ 1. Provide initial vocational education and training, also on an ad-hoc basis (e.g. courses for young people who have not entered the labour market yet)
- ☐ 2. Provide continuous training and adult education (e.g. re-training for those people who are currently working and need some updates/refreshing sessions)
- ☐ 3. Support training for teachers in VET
- ☐ 4. Support special needs groups (e.g. vulnerable youth, migrants and/or refugees, people with disabilities)
- ☐ 5. Support employability (e.g. career guidance, work-based learning in order to support transition from school to work)
- ☐ 6. Support entrepreneurship or start-up companies
- ☐ 7. Provide a voice to VET students in terms of satisfaction and suggestions for improvement
- ☐ 8. Provide a voice to the local community in terms of social needs related to VET and employment
- ☐ 9. Support intelligence creation in the VET/employability field (e.g. analytical capacity, independent research)
- ☐ 10. Another activity in the VET/employability field not listed above (please describe)

- ☐ 11. None of the above (please describe)

(If you tick 11, the questionnaire ends here)

A8. Who are the main beneficiaries of your organisation?

(multiple choice)

- ☐ 1. Civil society (not a particular target group)
- ☐ 2. Youth
- ☐ 3. Vulnerable youth (e.g. school drop outs, NEET (not in employment, education or training) youth)
- ☐ 4. Students
- ☐ 5. Adults
- ☐ 6. Women
- ☐ 7. Unemployed
- ☐ 8. Migrants and/or refugees
- ☐ 9. People with disabilities
- ☐ 10. Other (please specify)

A9. Does your organisation target a specific sector (e.g. NACE: statistical classifications of economic activities)?

(single choice)

- ☐ 1. Yes (go to A9.1)
- ☐ 2. No

A9.1 If YES, please specify which sector(s):

(multiple choice)

- ☐ 1. Agriculture, forestry and fishing
- ☐ 2. Mining and quarrying
- ☐ 3. Manufacturing
- ☐ 4. Electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply
- ☐ 5. Water supply, sewerage, waste management and remediation activities
- ☐ 6. Construction
- ☐ 7. Wholesale and retail trade, repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles
- ☐ 8. Transportation and storage
- ☐ 9. Accommodation and food service activities
- ☐ 10. Information and communication
- ☐ 11. Financial and insurance activities
- ☐ 12. Real estate activities
- ☐ 13. Professional, scientific and technical activities

- ☐ 14. Administrative and support service activities
- ☐ 15. Public administration and defence, compulsory social security
- ☐ 16. Education
- ☐ 17. Human health and social work activities
- ☐ 18. Arts, entertainment and recreation
- ☐ 19. Other service activities
- ☐ 20. Activities of households as employers, undifferentiated goods – and services – producing activities of households for own use
- ☐ 21. Activities of extraterritorial organisations and bodies

SECTION B: PARTICIPATION IN THE VET DIALOGUE AND VET POLICY

This section contains questions referring to the participation of the organisation in the VET dialogue, the main institutional counterparts, and the organisation's contribution to the VET policy cycle.

The VET policy cycle refers to the main following phases:

1. strategy formulation and policy design,
2. implementation and monitoring,
3. policy evaluation and review.

B1. Is your organisation consulted on VET, as regards the VET dialogue and policies?

(single choice)

- ☐ 1. Yes, regularly (go to B1.1)
- ☐ 2. Yes, occasionally (go to B1.1)
- ☐ 3. No (go to B1.2)

B1.1 If YES, by whom?

(multiple choice)

- ☐ 1. Governmental institutions (e.g. Ministry of Education/Labour/Economy/Social Affairs/etc. or any other public national, regional or local authority; governmental executive or supervisory agencies; etc.)
- ☐ 2. Employers
- ☐ 3. Trade Unions
- ☐ 4. VET providers (e.g. VET schools, training centres)
- ☐ 5. National Employment Service
- ☐ 6. Academic institutions
- ☐ 7. CSO platforms/forums
- ☐ 8. Other (please specify)

B1.2 If NO, why?

(multiple choice)

- ☐ 1. Missing legislative framework (no official recognition of civil society participation)
- ☐ 2. Legal framework exists but not implemented
- ☐ 3. Limited involvement of non-state and private actors
- ☐ 4. Lack of appropriate network in order to facilitate an inclusive dialogue among parties
- ☐ 5. Relevant parties are not clearly identified
- ☐ 6. Other reason (please specify)

- ☐ 7. My organisation is not interested in participating in the VET policy dialogue (go to B1.2.1)

B1.2.1 If your organisation is not interested in participating in dialogue as regards the VET policy, could you please explain why?

B2. Has your organisation ever contributed to the VET policy cycle with one or more of the following activities?

(multiple choice)

- ☐ 1. Facilitating stakeholders' participation
 - ☐ 2. Providing input to the policy formulation (e.g. contributing to identifying information – and gaps – prior to policy formulation)
 - ☐ 3. Providing VET training or employment services
 - ☐ 4. Providing trainings or other services to specific needs groups (e.g. vulnerable youth, the unemployed, migrants and/or refugees, people with disabilities)
 - ☐ 5. Providing mediation activities between governmental/public institutions and private actors (e.g. apprenticeship places for students/graduates, practices in companies)
 - ☐ 6. Any other support in training provision (please specify)
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-
- ☐ 7. Monitoring training provision (e.g. by assessing local or students' needs through consultations at the school and local level, such as questionnaires)
 - ☐ 8. Evaluating policy implementation (e.g. by consulting local society such as students or parents in order to understand the impact of policies)
 - ☐ 9. Disseminating results
 - ☐ 10. Other contribution (please specify)
-
-
-

(If you tick 10, go to section D)

- ☐ 11. None of the above

SECTION C: CURRENT INPUT TO THE VET POLICY CYCLE

This section contains questions about the content of the organisation's contribution to the VET policy cycle.

C1. On what did your organisation provide a contribution to the VET policy cycle?

(multiple choice)

- ☐ 1. Access to education (formal and non-formal)
- ☐ 2. Inclusive education (e.g. gender, people with disabilities, migrants and/or refugees, vulnerable youth, NEET youth)
- ☐ 3. Continued education (CVET, lifelong learning, etc.)
- ☐ 4. Quality of education
- ☐ 5. Information on the quantity and/or quality of teaching staff
- ☐ 6. Satisfaction of students
- ☐ 7. Satisfaction of local community
- ☐ 8. Satisfaction of employers
- ☐ 9. Students' needs in the context of transition from school to work
- ☐ 10. Relevance of education and identification of labour market needs
- ☐ 11. Entrepreneurial skills
- ☐ 12. Future of work/digitalisation
- ☐ 13. Piloting innovation in training
- ☐ 14. Green skills for the green economies
- ☐ 15. Qualifications
- ☐ 16. Curricula/competency-based training
- ☐ 17. Other (please specify)

C2. How do you contribute to the VET policy cycle?

(multiple choice)

- ☐ 1. Regular reporting (please specify to whom)
- ☐ 2. Formal consultation
- ☐ 3. Informal consultation (please specify with whom)
- ☐ 4. Other (please specify)

C3. What is the added value of your contribution to the VET policy cycle?

(multiple choice)

- ☐ 1. Provide independent advice to shape VET policies
- ☐ 2. Provide innovative advice to shape VET policies
- ☐ 3. Detect specific needs of groups not reached by the formal system and bring their voice to the policy dialogue
- ☐ 4. Improve the efficiency of social dialogue
- ☐ 5. Guarantee transparency of public consultation
- ☐ 6. Improve the quality of the VET policy process
- ☐ 7. Facilitate transparency and accountability of VET policies' implementation
- ☐ 8. Support effectiveness of VET training provision
- ☐ 9. Monitor VET policies' implementation
- ☐ 10. Evaluate objectively VET policies' outcomes
- ☐ 11. Other (please specify)

C4. How could your organisation improve the relevance of your contribution to the VET policy cycle?

(multiple choice)

- ☐ 1. More involvement in the planning phase
- ☐ 2. More involvement in the implementation phase (training provision)
- ☐ 3. More involvement in the monitoring phase
- ☐ 4. More involvement in the evaluation phase
- ☐ 5. Better coordination with policy makers
- ☐ 6. More resources
- ☐ 7. A stronger network
- ☐ 8. More effective dissemination of results
- ☐ 9. Improving lobbying activities
- ☐ 10. Other (please specify)

SECTION D: POTENTIAL INPUT TO THE VET POLICY CYCLE

This section contains questions that gather information on the potential contribution of the organisation to the VET policy cycle.

D1. On what could your organisation provide a contribution to the VET policy cycle?

(multiple choice)

- ☐ 1. Access to education (formal and non-formal)
 - ☐ 2. Inclusive education (e.g. gender, people with disabilities, migrants and/or refugees, vulnerable youth, NEET youth)
 - ☐ 3. Continued education (CVET, lifelong learning, etc.)
 - ☐ 4. Quality of education
 - ☐ 5. Information on the quantity and/or quality of teaching staff
 - ☐ 6. Satisfaction of students
 - ☐ 7. Satisfaction of local community
 - ☐ 8. Satisfaction of employers
 - ☐ 9. Students' needs in the context of transition from school to work
 - ☐ 10. Relevance of education and identification of labour market needs
 - ☐ 11. Entrepreneurial skills
 - ☐ 12. Future of work/digitalisation
 - ☐ 13. Piloting innovation in training
 - ☐ 14. Green skills for the green economies
 - ☐ 15. Qualifications
 - ☐ 16. Curricula/competency-based training
 - ☐ 17. Other (please specify)
-
-

D2. What could be the added value of your contribution to the VET policy cycle?

(multiple choice)

- ☐ 1. Provide independent advice to shape VET policies
 - ☐ 2. Provide innovative advice to shape VET policies
 - ☐ 3. Detect specific needs of groups not reached by the formal system and bring their voice to the policy dialogue
 - ☐ 4. Improve the efficiency of social dialogue
 - ☐ 5. Guarantee transparency of public consultation
 - ☐ 6. Improve the quality of the VET policy process
 - ☐ 7. Facilitate transparency and accountability of VET policies' implementation
 - ☐ 8. Support effectiveness of VET training provision
 - ☐ 9. Monitor VET policies' implementation
 - ☐ 10. Evaluate objectively VET policies' outcomes
 - ☐ 11. Other (please specify)
-
-

D3. Which of the following would activate your organisation's contribution to the VET policy cycle?

Please score each of them according to their importance for your organisation.

	(1) Not important	(2) Somewhat important	(3) Important	(4) Very important	(5) Extremely important
1. Improved coordination with policy makers					
2. Creation of network(s) of organisations working in the same field					
3. Strengthening of existing network(s)					
4. Improvement of the organisation's expertise					
5. Enhancement of official recognition					
6. Additional resources					
7. Increasing interest of organisations					
8. Other (specify) _____					

(End of questionnaire)

Annex 2. Interview with Yousef Shalian, Director of the vocational training programme at the Lutheran World Federation and Chairperson of the NGO-VET league in Palestine (November 2018)

Do you think there is space for NGOs in the policy dialogue in Palestine?

Since its creation in 2003, the NGO-VET league has been an active player in the policy debate on VET in Palestine. At regular interval, the network is consulted on VET policy issues, either through its elected representatives or its members are directly involved in the debate on improving training and access to the labour market.

Would you say this contribution takes place in a formalised, structured environment or that it remains mostly informal?

In 2018, the NGO-VET league was integrated as the Civil Society representative on the board of the newly established Higher Council that is now leading the VET reform in the country. Where individual CSOs and the NGO-VET league have always been part and parcel of the debates, the consultations are now consolidated and take place in a formalised environment. We see this as a recognition of our active role in the policy dialogue.

The Higher Council is a high-level entity chaired by the Minister of Education or the Minister of Labour on a rotating basis. Do you feel CSOs have an impact or influence at this level?

We represent 17 members that together are training over 2 000 students per year, often in dire circumstances and in hard-to-reach places where the Ministries cannot operate. This provides us with some leverage, not only to the government, but also to technical and financial partners that seek our advice while formulating VET interventions.

Globally CSOs play an important role in keeping governments accountable and advocate for adequate service delivery. Can you share an experience where you had to pull your weight in order to have corrective measures taken on VET issues?

At the NGO-VET league we have been part of the debate for years, which allowed us to influence the VET policies early at the planning stage, rather than in a heated public debate. As our members have always invested in equitable access, relevance and quality of training provision, we have been able to pilot innovation and to showcase these best practices to the decision-makers in dedicated working groups or sub-committees.

To give an example, work-based learning has recently been mainstreamed by the Ministry of Education and our years of experience in this field have been taken into account. In an effort to improve employability, our CSO members try to provide training in more flexible formats, via evening courses or upgrading courses over the weekend. Also here we tend to showcase what works to the VET dialogue in a lifelong learning perspective.

What is the added value of the network in terms of training provision?

As NGO-VET league members, we support each other. We share common objectives, which provides us with a framework for collaboration. This can be in the form of co-creation (i.e. some members are currently developing new training programmes on renewable energy) or by exchanging practical and technical know-how (i.e. specifications for the purchase of technical equipment).

Do your members target special needs groups?

Many members are embedded in hard to reach places and are providing training to vulnerable youth in those areas. One of our newest members is the Al-Amal Association for the Deaf in Qalqilya, providing VET for the deaf. Other members are leading in providing training and access to the labour

market for women and girls. Also here we see that when the government is trying to improve its outreach, the best practices of our members serve as an inspiration.

How would you describe your relationship with technical and financial partners active in VET?

We have a long history of collaborating with technical and financial partners. In 2008, our network benefitted from a large-scale USAID-funded programme that also led to a further institutionalisation of the network. Ever since, we have kept a VET league office and ensured the necessary coordination amongst our members. Donor support has allowed us to train a significant number of young people while further enhancing the capacity of our members to improve their services. These experiences are then further shared within the wider VET dialogue.

Most recently, our members served as a pilot group for a newly developed national monitoring and evaluation framework developed by the government in collaboration with the ETF, the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) and the Belgian development agency (Enabel). Before rolling it out at the national level, the pilot with our members proved its feasibility and readiness for scaling.

ABBREVIATIONS

AID	Association d'appui aux initiatives de développement (NGO)
CSO	civil society organisation
CVET	continuing vocational education and training
ETF	European Training Foundation
EU	European Union
IVET	initial vocational education and training
NEET	not in employment, education or training
NGO	non-governmental organisation
SEMED	Southern and Eastern Mediterranean
VET	vocational education and training

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